

A Universal Ethic of Good Living

Buddhist Ethics of Pancasila and their Universal Acclaimability

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Early Buddhist texts of Indian origin which are more than twenty-five centuries old offer us a code of ethics which answer to the above requirement of being universal in application. Mythical as they appear to be in their genesis because of their very close connection with the person of the Cakkavatti or Universal Monarch [Skt. Cakravartin], they still carry with them the fragrance of Buddhist social justice. They germinated in India, in the eastern world where until much later times, petty parochial views of a created world did not stir up issues of competitively sectarian and personal interests. There were no thoughts of chosen groups who needed to be favored. The story of the genesis of the Four Castes or *Catur Varṇa* is an open secret. The evolution of the universe with its unimaginable dimensions, as *cūlanika* -, *majjhamika* - and *mahā-lokadhātu* [i.e.

small, medium and large world systems] was known to the Indians for more than thousands of years. They had known the equivalent of a Big Bang theory about the origin of the universe [*vivaṭṭamāna-kappa* and *saṃvaṭṭamāna-kappa*], together with the cognate idea of the Big Crunch.

Preliminary observations

This is a study based on the texts and traditions of Theravada Buddhism as a living phenomenon, dating back to more than twenty-five centuries. The concept of *pañcasīla* or the Buddhist norm of reverence and regard for five societal considerations which are indisputably binding on mankind for their successful growth and for the smooth continuance of the human community, is presented to us in the earliest of the Buddhist teachings as contained in Pali literature. A careful study of these references clearly indicates that *pañcasīla* occupies a position which could be declared as being 'universally acclaimable'. By using the phrase universally acclaimable, we wish to convey the idea that faithful adherence by everyone, everywhere, east or west, north or south, to these virtues which are upheld by the concept of *pañcasīla* contributes, without exception, to the wholesome growth and development of mankind, physically, morally and spiritually.

We shall attempt in this essay to clarify how it works, via each individual to the society in which each one lives, and conversely via the society to each individual who constitutes that society. This process of mutual interaction indicates the social and individual dimensions of the benefits that would accrue in consequence of a strict adherence to and a sincere implementation of the principles of *pañcasīla*. It would also be equally clear that this a law whose operational validity was true of yesterday, is equally true today and shall be so tomorrow. Briefly stated, these considerations are: 1. Respect for all life in every form [*pāṇātipātā veramaṇī*], 2. Respect for the right of others for ownership of their legitimately acquired property and possessions [*adinnādānā veramaṇī*] which constitute their source of happiness in life [*tuṭṭhijananakam*], 3. Respect for

propriety in sex relationships, pre-marital, marital and extra-marital [*kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī*], 4. Respect for honesty of word in speech and action [*musāvādā veramaṇī*], and 5. Personal concern to safeguard one's sanity of judgement by abstaining from the use of drugs and intoxicants [*surā-meraya-majja-pamāda-tthānā veramaṇī*].

These virtues which are delivered and placed before the world in their unmistakably specific form by Buddhism over twenty-five centuries ago can be taken out of their Buddhist context without any injury or injustice, and they can be delivered anywhere else, embodying at the same time their essential spirit, and laying the same intended emphasis. They do not claim, as we shall soon discover, and they do not reserve for themselves, any exclusive monopolistic rights which preclude them from being used by any other.

Pañcasīla and its extra-religious character

Let us first begin with a probe into the extra-religious aspect of the injunctions of the *pañcasīla* which comes to be revealed to us from the Pali Buddhist texts themselves. On a closer and careful examination, we would discover that it is really the outcome of a magnanimous universalization and making available to the world at large of an essential Buddhist theme. In the realm of Buddhist myths and legends, one discovers the widely respected idea of the just world ruler or Universal Monarch who is referred to in Pali as *rājā cakkavatti* [Skt. Cakravartin]. While he is viewed as the ideal ruler in the world, the Buddhist texts use two adjectives among others to describe him as an upholder of righteousness: *dhammiko* and *dhamma-rājā* [DN. I. 86 ; II.16 ; III. 59]. As a Universal Monarch, he has command over the entire earth, extending up to its four extremities [*cāturanto* and *vijitāvī*. loc. cit.]. Further, as he holds his states with stability and provides adequate security to his people, he is also called *janapadatthāvariyaṭṭo* [loc. cit.]. Even in passing, we should not fail to note here the sensitivity and awareness which Buddhist texts of such an ancient date reflect with regard to these eternal virtues of righteous rulers and successful

governments.

Such a ruler gains command over the entire earth in all directions, without the need to shed even a drop of blood. In his conquests, he has no need of arms [*adaṇḍena asatthena abhivijjya*. loc. cit. i.e. conquering with no force of arms.]. Since his conquest is via righteousness or just means [*dhammena abhivijjya*], his subordinate rulers everywhere submissively seek his counsel, offering themselves up to him and praying for commands and directions [*Ehi kho mahārāja sāgataṃ mahārāja sakaṃ te mahārāja anusāsa mahārājā ' ti*. DN. II.173 ; III. 63]. Even in this what appears to be a mythical or make believe situation, there are a few valuable lessons which the Buddhist texts attempt to teach humanity.

Firstly, there is the situation that legitimate victory or justifiable acquisition of new territories requires willing submission on the part of those who are won over. This is clearly reflected in the attitude of the provincial rulers who come to the Universal Monarch, offering submission and seeking directions. The Monarch on his part, in handling his subordinate rulers, reflects a rare nobility of character in his dignified detachment and absence of greed for new assets or acquisitions by way of territory. These are the ideals which Buddhism upholds and expects the world at large to strive to live up to.

Political leadership or rulership over people as viewed in Buddhist thinking, much more specifically than anywhere in Indian statecraft, reflects a vast segment of benevolence and love for the subjects over whom a ruler presides. Pali literary sources constantly define the term ***rājā*** which is the Indian equivalent of the word king [not necessarily etymologically, but in terms of their socio-ethical thinking], as *dhammena pare rañjayatī ' ti kho Vāsetṭha rājā* [DN. III. 93], i.e. a king is one who righteously delights and gladdens the subjects who are under his care.

Here we are driven to observe that the comment in the Pali English

Dictionary [PTS. See under *rājā*] that this is 'a fanciful etymology' is not only quite uncalled for, but is certainly an instance of completely missing the point of the remark in its proper context. The Buddhist lexicographic process is to be understood and appreciated from its own approach. The definition in Buddhist literature, at times, of the word *bhikkhu* as *saṃsāre bhayaṃ ikkhatī ' ti bhikkhu*, i.e. 'one who sees fear and danger in the cyclical process of existence or *saṃsāra* is a bhikkhu' is a good example of this. Thus in their Buddhist way, having visualized the true role of a king or what true kingship should be, the compilers of Buddhist texts are consistent in their portrayal of the ideal king. And the Cakkavatti or the Universal Monarch was undoubtedly their true model.

Pañcasīla and its universal relevance

The role of Cakkavatti as Universal Monarch being clearly delineated in Buddhist texts, we discover that the counsel he offers to the rulers who come to him from all quarters has two major points of interest. Peace and security in the lives of the people and honorable and dignified living in the community is his first major concern. Towards the achievement of this goal he looks up to the moral rectitude of the people of the land, and for this as a means to an end, he sees nothing better than the *pañcasīla* or the observance of the moral injunctions of the five precepts. Each new ruler who comes to him seeking his advice is asked to enforce among his people strict observance of these injunctions. Here one has to take adequate notice of the difference between the *sīla* or precepts as they appear as part of the self-adopted religious observances of Buddhist lay devotees and as they are introduced here, more or less, as state law. As state law under the Cakkavatti's command they read as:

1. No life should be destroyed [*Pāṇo na hantabbo*]
2. None should be robbed or dispossessed of their legitimate possessions [*Adinnaṃ na ādāttabbaṃ*]
3. No indulgence in improper sex relations [*Kāmesu micchā na caritabbā*] **

This is not *pas kam sapa* or fivefold sense pleasures as some Sri Lankan

monks and lay scholars would have us believe.

4. Dishonesty of speech is to be avoided [*Musā na bhaṇitabbā*]
5. No drugs or intoxicants that lead to infatuation or impairment of judgement are to be consumed [*Majjaṃ na pātabbaṃ*]

DN.II. 173, III. 62

It is as though the enforcement of these injunctions and the maintenance of moral order is part of the duty of sub-rulers and their own states. This is the major component of the Cakkavatti's advice to his subordinates who appear to be, in fact, provincial governors.

In the second part of his counsel, he gives his provincial rulers complete autonomy in the administration of their political systems as they have hitherto done. Indicating that he has no desire whatsoever for political re-structuring for a federated state, he asks them 'to enjoy their status as they did before' [*Yathā bhuttañ ca bhujjatha. ibid.*]. It is very unfortunate that this vital bit of information enshrined in the Pali text is lost to the English reader, due to a serious inaccuracy of translation. T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids, in their translation of the Mahasudassana Sutta of the Digha Nikaya, render it in 1910 as 'Ye shall eat as ye have eaten' [Dialogues of the Buddha, Vol. II. 203]. But by 1921, Rhys Davids had doubts about the accuracy of their own translation, and in the translation of the same phrase in the Cakkavattisihanada Sutta, also of the Digha Nikaya, offer a new idea as 'Enjoy your possessions as you have been want to do' [Dial. III. 64].

We laud this change as a great triumph of a pioneer, reaching nearer to the truth. At the same time we have to lament, and warn our readers that Maurice Walshe, in his translation of the Digha Nikaya in 1987 under the title **Thus Have I Heard**, renders the above phrase in both places as 'Be moderate in eating' [Thus Have I Heard by Maurice Walshe, 1987, pp. 281, 398]. It goes without saying that with the *pañcasīla* ethic which the Universal Monarch wishes to

propagate, the reference to the rulers about their eating habits seems to make no sense at all. [We are much sadder today, in the year 2001, that the 1996 reprint of this text [as a new edition] still carries this mistake, although we had ourselves drawn Mr. Walshe's attention to this soon after the publication of the first edition and he agreed to attend to it at his earliest. But the new edition came only after his death.].

It is also to be noted here that no idea of a religious creed, or allegiance to a prophet or messiah whatsoever is introduced at this stage into this organization of moral and social well-being of the world. Thus we discover here the Buddhist texts introducing the concept of *pañcasīla*, without any sectarian bias, as a medium of social regeneration, revitalization and sustenance. This idea of the down-to-earth validity of *pañcasīla*, quite apart from the transcendental aspirations, which we are able to point out here from this semi-legendary presentation of the Cakkavatti king in Buddhist texts, is also traceable in the more classical Buddhist texts which deal with the general corpus of basic Buddhist teachings. In a set of two verses belonging to the Malavagga, the Dhammapada [Dhp. verses 246-7] declares that the failure to safeguard these virtues of the *pañcasīla* would bring about a catastrophic breakup and an utter ruin of an individual's earthly life, here and now, in this very existence.

*Yo pāṇaṃ atipāṭeti musāvādañ ca bhāsati
loke adinnaṃ ādiyati paradārañ ca gacchati
surāmerayapānañ ca yo naro anuyuñjatii
idh ' eva eso lokasmiṃ mūlaṃ khaṇati attano*

Dhp. vv. 246-7

Whoso in this world destroys life, tells lies, takes
what is not given, goes to others' wives, and is
addicted to intoxicating drinks, such a one digs up
his own root in this world.

Translated by the author

The stress here is undeniably on the need to safeguard against the social implications of unethical living. The inclusion of these verses in the Malavagga of the Dhammapada, with an awareness of the corrosion and corruption which any breach of the injunctions of the *pañcasīla* brings about, without looking at them merely in terms of their religious consequences, is also particularly noteworthy. It is equally interesting to discover these same verses being included in another religious text, namely the Anguttara Nikaya [AN.III. 205], but with a very crucial addition introduced into it. This portion of the text assesses, in a religious sense, the consequences of violating the *pañcasīla*. Those who breach them are said to suffer in their next life, in a state of degeneracy after death.

*Yo pāṇaṃ atipāṭeti musāvādañ ca bhāsati
loke adinnaṃ ādiyati paradārañ ca gacchati
surāmerayapānañ ca yo naro anuyuñjati
appahāya pañca verāni dussīlo iti vuccati
kāyassa bhedaṃ duppañño nirayaṃ so upapajjati.*

AN. III. 205

Whosoever in this world destroys life, tells lies,
takes what is not given, goes to others' wives,
and is addicted to intoxicating drinks, such a one
who does not give up his hostilities towards society,
would be called a villainous person and on his death
would be born in woeful states of purgatory.

Translated by the author

However, we must not fail to add that the text here has not lost sight of the social implications of violating the injunctions of *pañcasīla*. Not only does the word *dussīlo* appearing in these verses above adequately emphasize the loss of virtues of social morality, but also the prose text which accompanies these verses does speak very eloquently about the penalties which a person who violates them has to face in this very life. They are carefully listed as hostility

[*veraṃ*] and dread [*bhayaṃ*] which come upon an evil doer in consequence of his or her misdeeds, as well as mental anguish [*domanassaṃ*] and uneasiness [*dukkhaṃ*] he or she has to suffer [*Yaṃ gahapti pāṇātipātappaccayā diṭṭhadhammikam' pi bhayaṃ veraṃ pasavati samparāyikm 'pi bhayaṃ veraṃ pasavati cetasikam ' pi dukkhaṃ domanassaṃ paṭisaṃvedeti. Ibid.*].

At this stage, we would do well to trace our steps back into history more than two and a half millennia ago, to a time well before the appearance of some of the great prophets and messiahs of the world, and seek the company of the Buddha, just yet another mortal who reached the state of transcendence or immortality by his own masterful development of the potential of human wisdom to its highest point of perfection. For the Buddha is primarily the Fully Enlightened One [*Sammā-sambuddha*], i.e. one who is fully enlightened both with regard to the real nature of the predicament of the humans in the world in which they live [i.e. *saṃsāra*], and with regard to working out by each one, by his own effort, a solution for their redemption. This is a way of release which each one has to work out by oneself, without supplication and prayer addressed to any redeemer besides oneself. Religious and spiritual power in Theravada Buddhism, as any student of the religion would appreciate, is essentially self-propelled. In the light of Theravada Buddhist teachings, if anything called omnipotence in a religious sense could be conceded, it has to be sought within the human personality itself. It does not exist external to it. This idea is most courageously expressed in the Dhammapada as follows.

Oneself is indeed one' s own guide and guardian.

Who else could be one' s guide?

In the conquest of oneself, one discovers

A guide and guardian who is most difficult to find.

Translated by the author

Attā hi attano nātho ko hi nātho paro siyā

attanā ' va sudantena nāthaṃ labhati dullabaṃ.

This is even more emphatically stated as a major axiom of Buddhist teachings [*dhammuddesa*] in the Ratṭhapāla Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya where it says -

The world provides no external refuge or succour to mankind.

The world of humans has no external power to guide its destiny.

Translated by the author

Attāṇo loko anabhissaro.

MN.II. 68

We stress here this basic characteristic of Buddhism, not merely because we wish to appear different from many others, a point which we think certainly needs to be stressed and not be muffled or veiled, but to highlight the emphasis which such an orientation in thinking lays on ethical and moral self-correction which are needed for one's spiritual uplift and social pre-eminence. For it is this helping hand within oneself which lifts the humans up and lift them out of the mire into which they allow themselves to slip and sink. This is a situation in which humanity is often caught up due to its own lack of resolve and determination on the one hand, and through its own devastating spirit of helplessness and surrender on the other. Let us bring to mind here yet another verse from the Dhammapada which very vigorously stimulates us to battle against this lethargy and meek surrender.

Heedfulness and vigilance leads us to triumph over death,

i.e. enables us to gain spiritual immortality.

Neglect and delay pave the way to death and disaster.

The vigilant and watchful never do die.

Those who are heedless are very much like unto the dead.

Translated by the author

*Appamādo amatapadaṃ pamādo maccuno padaṃ
appamattā na miyanti ye pamattā yathā matā.*

Dhp. v. 21

Genesis of Pañcasīla

Grooming ourselves with these preparatory observations relating to personal correction and self-adjustment of men and women, whether young or old, let us now take a closer look at these injunctions of *pañcasīla* as they are laid down in their own Buddhist contexts. We discover one of the finest examples of these in the Sāleyyaka Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya [MN. I. 285 ff.]. Here we discover the Buddha in the midst of the residents of the entire village of Sālā. In answer to questions put to him by them with regard to misery and degeneracy to which some humans are seen to be subject, the Buddha makes a very penetrative and exhaustive analysis of evils which beset society, leading its membership to woeful and painful situations in life, with special reference to life after death. In the process, he focuses attention on the conduct of men and women in society which the Buddhist texts refer to as *cariyā* [Skt. *caryā*]. Human conduct, wherever it reflects wildness and viciousness [*adhamma* or unrighteous and *visama* or wild and violent], leads to unhappy results. While the greater part of this sutta deals with matters of primary social relevance such as healthy and harmonious relationships within communities, security and safety of persons and property, good will and cheer, the main concern of the sutta is given as the penalties and punishments which the humans have to suffer in their life after death, for the breaches in conduct which men and women indulge in as they run through their hectic course of life here on earth.

The norms of good conduct laid down in this sutta thus acquire a twofold validity which we could designate as social and religious or mundane and spiritual. The sutta gives us the standard list of ten items [*dasa kammaṭṭhā*], covering the entire range of human action through thought, word and deed, as

analyzed and discussed in Buddhist teachings. They are *kusala* or efficient action if they are good and wholesome and *akusala* or unwholesome if they are disruptive and destructive . Speaking in very broad outline, their being good or bad depends on the nature of their impact on the human community, either individually or collectively, contributing to their well-being and happiness or their opposites.

These actions are listed under three categories as bodily, verbal and mental. Details of their classification are as follows.

Bodily:Killing, stealing and adultery

Verbal:Lying, slander, harsh words and frivolous speech

Mental:Covetousness, ill will and perverse views.

The performance of efficient actions or *kusala kamma* implies good living which in turn is also rewarded with a happier life or *sugati* in the birth after death. Their opposites, referred to negatively as *akusala* bring about opposite results of degeneracy, [i.e. of losing the privileged position of being born as humans] and consequently being subject to penitential suffering [*paṭisaṃvedetī*] as would be required in terms of the law of *kamma* [*yathābhatam nikkhiito evam niraye* MN. I. 71. Also SN. IV. 325]. We have already indicated above, quoting the Dhammapada verses 246-7, that the Buddhist teachings are fully alive to the impact of human behavior, good and bad, on the present life of humans, here and now.

What we would like to stress here, through a study of this sutta, is the Buddhist concern for a total vigil over human action for the weal and welfare of mankind and for the safety and security of life in the world in which they live. Therefore we are right in concluding that it is the regulation of human conduct, and not prayer and supplication to any believed-in higher power above, which Theravada Buddhism upholds as the source of blessings for the world. Like the ancient reference to ` the writing on the wall ' this idea is presented with sufficient

assurance as well as an implied note of alarm in the very simple but grandiose Mangala Sutta [Sn. p. 46f.] that he who pays heed to the regulative processes and injunctions in society reaches with ease success and serenity everywhere [*sabbattha sotthiṃ gacchanti*. Sn, v. 269]. Among thirty-eight standard items of good personality traits which are presented in this sutta, we find wise choice of associates, avoidance of blamable behavior, acquisition of learning and skills, respectful inter-personal relationships with parents, wife and children and one's relations as well as personal self-restraint as deserving of special attention. Thus the sutta concludes in this manner.

Those who conform to such norms of conduct shall
 Everywhere be triumphant and suffer no defeat.
 Everywhere they shall reach success and serenity.
 This shall be their highest blessing.

Translated by the author

*Etādisāni katvāna sabbattha m ' aparājītā
 sabbattha sotthiṃ gacchanti
 taṃ tesaṃ maṅgalam uttamaṃ.*

Sn.p.47. v. 269

Men and women and their moral considerations

The Buddha who is held in very high esteem as one who propounds ultimate transcendental values, of a state of bliss well above the triumphs of the world, in his admonition to the people of Sālā on these moral issues of social relevance, indicates the religious significance of good living in this world, while being human. Therein is believed to lie the divinity of man as is implied in the phrase *brahmavihāra* which is so often used in the inculcation of healthy modes of living for man. Correction and elevation of the quality of good living as indicated above is considered the basis of both improving and assessing one's chances in life's spiritual ascent. It is, in fact, in this vital sense of regulative precepts that the

word *sīla* is used in the term *pañcasīla*. Well-regulated good living assures good journeying in *saṃsāra*, with adequate happiness and comfort of body and mind, i.e. *sukha* and *somanassa*. This is where one invokes the purity and serenity of mind in the process of living, of love and benevolence [i.e. *manasā ce pasannena* of Dhp. v. 2], shutting out evil and viciousness [as in *manasā ce paduṭṭhena* of Dhp. v. 1]. For it is the former, love and benevolence of heart alone, which bestows comfort and happiness on mankind [*tato naṃ sukhaṃ anveti* loc. cit.]. The process of its opposite, namely evil and viciousness in the human heart, can bring nothing but misery to mankind [*tato naṃ dukkhaṃ anveti*. Ibid.].

The entire regulative process of culture in Buddhism, for success in the life we live here, i.e. for comfort and happiness for which all mankind craves, and for success in our transcendental attainments, i.e. for the final bliss in Nirvana, is built on this theme of a well adjusted mind-frame, of a heart full of love, of non-conflict, of undifferentiated love that knows no difference between the self and the other. For this alone leads in the direction of effacement of egoistic build-up or *sakkāya-ditṭhi* which is the first of three obstacles to be cleared with the attainment of *sotāpatti* on the path to liberation.

Pañcasīla in its Buddhist setting

Before we proceed to discuss the concept of *pañcasīla* in its religious context, let us now examine the structure of the *pañcasīla* set-up and see how it has come to be constituted in its present form. As the word *pañca* here implies, it consists of five items of *sīla* or precepts of moral conduct. As we take them and look closer, we find four of these coming under the ten items of human conduct or *dasa kammaṭṭha* which we have already referred to above while referring to the Sāleyyaka Sutta. The first three of these refer to abstinence from the three items of bad bodily action, namely killing, stealing and adultery [*pāṇātipātā*, *adinnādānā* and *kāmesu micchācārā*]. The fourth item of the *pañcasīla* is the first of the four items of verbal misconduct, namely lying [*musāvādā*]. Since bad

verbal action is concerned with different mal-practices of speech, we presume that this major insistence on honesty in speech could even have some sway over the other three of slander, harsh speech and frivolous speech. We also understand why in formulating external regulatory injunctions, the *pañcasīla* does not attempt to reach the internal area of mental action. Both detection and prosecution in this submerged field of mind activity is understandably out of the reach of tools of moral social organization. And we are now left with the last item, i.e. no. 5 of the *pañcasīla*. This is the rule which forbids the use of drugs and intoxicants [*Surā-meraya-majja-pamāda-tthānā veramaṇī sikkhā-padaṃ*].

Intoxicants: health hazards and erratic behavior

At this stage, we would choose to make a special study of this fifth precept of the *pañcasīla* relating to the use of drugs and intoxicants. In the codified *sīla* formulations in Buddhism, namely *pañcasīla* or the five precepts, *aṭṭhaṅgasīla* or the eight precepts and *dasasīla* or *dasasikkhāpada* or the ten precepts, abstinence from the use of drugs and intoxicants appears with unfailing regularity as the fifth item in all lists. Even in their formulation in metrical form as already quoted above from the Dhammapada, the stricture on the use of drugs and intoxicants is carefully woven in to be part of the regular code.

Yo pāṇaṃ atipāṭeti musāvādañ ca bhāsati

Loke adinnaṃ ādiyati paradārañ ca gacchati

Surāmerayapānañ ca yo naro anuyuñjati

Idh ' ev 'eso loksmim mūlaṃ khaṇati attano.

Dhp. vv. 246-7. Also at AN.III. 205

The Dhammika Sutta of the Sutta Nipata expresses this idea of the fifth precept of the *pañcasīla* with even greater clarity and emphasis [Sn.p. 69 . vv. 398-9].

Majjañ ca pānaṃ na samācareyya

dhammaṃ imaṃ rocaye yo gahaṭṭho
na pāyaye pivataṃ nānujaññā
ummādanaṃ tam itī naṃ viditvā.
Madā hi pāpāni karonti bālā
kārenti c'aññe' pi jane pamatte
etaṃ apuññāyatanāṃ vivajjaye
ummādanaṃ mohanaṃ bālakantaṃ

Sn. vv. 398-9

Resort not to the use of intoxicating drinks.
 The householder should respect this principle.
 He should neither make others drink,
 Nor approve the drinking habit of others,
 Knowing it to be a process of maddening.
 The unwise do evil deeds through intoxication.
 They prompt other negligent ones to do likewise.
 Thus one should avoid this area of evil activity
 Which is maddening and misleading,
 And is indulged in by the unwise.

Translated by the author

Nevertheless, if we would now go back to the Buddha's admonition to the people of Sala who were essentially a community of lay people, explaining to them what he considers to be wholesome conduct and healthy living, i.e. *dhammacariyā* and *samacariyā*, we discover that under the ten items of bad conduct [i.e. *dasa kammaṃpatha*], this one of indulgence in the use of drugs and intoxicants does not find a place. We believe this merely implies that it is not severally itemized as a specific form of bad conduct. We should also not fail to mention here that in the oft-quoted and rightly famous Sigāla Sutta [DN.III.180 ff.] of the Theravāda tradition, we discover a very sophisticated classification of human activity under the name of *kamma-kilesa* or baneful activity which lists

only the first four items of the *pañcasīla* [*cattāro kammakilesā*], leaving out the one on the use of drugs and intoxicants. In fact, the sutta quotes as Buddha's own utterance a verse supporting this idea of the fourfold classification.

*Idaṃ vatvā sugato athāparaṃ etadavoca satthā.
Pāṇātipāto adinnādānaṃ musāvādo ca vuccati
paradāragamaṇā c ' eva nappasaṃsanti paṇḍitā.*

DN.III.182

It is also equally true that in the more classical studies of *sīla* as a part of Buddhist moral training, specially laid down for the earnest Buddhist disciple [as *evaṃ pabbajito samāno* at MN.I.179, Culahatthipadopama Sutta], preparatory to his undertaking of mind-culture or *adhicittasikkhā* [its goal being referred to as *samādhī*], this injunction relating to abstinence from the use of drugs and intoxicants does not occur as an item of *sīla*. [See Digha Nikaya Samannaphala Sutta at DN.I.63 and Majjhima Nikaya Culahatthipadopama Sutta at MN.I.179]. What is to be appreciated here is that at this stage *sīla* was still pre-codified and pre-legalized as a scheme of religious discipline or training, whether for monk or layman. Perhaps, on the other hand, indulgence in the use of drugs and intoxicants was apparently a too evident self-degrading vice, with relatively less inter-personal corrosiveness. Hence it would have been deemed wiser, in the first instance, to leave it to the discretion and judgement of the individual rather than drag it into the institutionalized network of religious correction and coercion.

As far as the monastic community was concerned, this omission was immediately corrected, by the Buddha himself, on the discovery of a lapse on the part of a monk who slipped into the degraded position of being completely drunk in public. The Buddha's major consideration on this occasion was whether any person should consume or partake of anything which would rob him of the use of his senses, the word very carefully used in this instance being *visaññī* or desensitized [*Api nu kho bhikkhave taṃ pātabbaṃ yam pivitvā visaññī assā ' ti.*

Vin.IV.p.110]. In the codified rules of the Patimokkha, the use of intoxicants has thus come to be declared an offense as a Pacittiya [No.51], i.e. an offense of a relatively minor grade [Vin. IV.p.109]. For the layman, it is included as a codified injunction in all lists of *sīla*, such as *pañcasīla* [five precepts] for regular day to day use, *aṭṭhaṅgasīla* [eight precepts] for observance on the days of the *uposatha* or the days of the fast of the full moon, new moon and the quarter moons. It is also included in the *dasa-sikkhāpadāni* or the ten precepts of *sīla* meant for the *sāmaṇera* or novitiate [male or female].

The ban on drugs and intoxicants in Buddhism thus appears to have come to acquire a special significance. The primary need for this seems to have been more social than religious. Consequently it has become a subject of special investigation under the promulgation of social ethics for the layman. The Sigāla Sutta [DN.III.182] which we have already quoted above in connection with the fourfold baneful activity or *kamma-kilesā*, in which the ban on intoxicants is incidentally left out, has a very special separate study on the evil consequences of the use of drugs and intoxicants [*Cha kho'me gahapatiputta ādīnavā surā-meraya-majja-pamāda-ṭṭhānānuyoge*]. It is equally interesting to note that this special study on the evils of the use of drugs and intoxicants, comes up in fact as the first item in another listing of six items which are referred to as causes of economic decline of a lay householder [*cha bhogānaṃ apāyamukhānī*].

Let us now take a close look at this special analysis. The six evil consequences of the use of intoxicants are:

1. Drainage of one's economic resources, here and now [*sandiṭṭhikā dhananjānī*].
2. Genesis of quarrels and disputes [*kalaha-ppavaḍḍhanī*].
3. A source of health hazards [*rogānaṃ āyatanaṃ*].
4. Damages one's prestige and reputation [*akitti-sañjananī*].
5. Loss of one's sense of shame [*kopīna-niddaṃsanī* = i.e. displays one's nakedness].

6. Weakens and destroys the power of the brain [*paññāya dubbalīkaraṇī*].

Here we cannot but be impressed by the down-to-earth reality and the worldly wisdom of this analysis. It highlights and focuses attention on three vital areas of consideration of life in the world of men and women. They are a. economic well being [no.1.], b. health [nos. 3 & 6] and c. social standing [nos. 2, 4 and 5]. Reports which reach us from many parts of the world today as analyses of social scientists and medical researchers, as well as law enforcement authorities reveal that many crimes in both the eastern and the western world are primarily traceable back as being committed under the influence of drugs and intoxicants, directly or indirectly, whether they be motor vehicle accidents on the highways, sex offenses in public or private places. Most instances of perverse and erratic behavior of both men and women are often the outcome of impaired judgement which results from continued use of drugs and intoxicants. The sutta's observations on the use of intoxicants and related health hazards appear most topical and updated.

The latest edition of the Journal of the American Medical Association [September 1993], available to us at the time this study was made, is said to report:

' In 1989, the national rate of alcohol-related hospital admissions was 48.2 per 10,000 among people age 65 and over, the study found. [For men, it was 54.7 per 10,000 population; for women, 14.8 per 10,000]. The 65- and over age group was second only to 45- to 65- year olds in the rate of hospitalization for alcohol-related reasons ... " We have almost certainly under-estimated alcohol-related problems in this population," the researcher concluded.'

In the light of these analyses and studies of today, pursued more than twenty-five centuries after the promulgation of the Sigāla Sutta, we are compelled to observe the correctness of the sutta's early analysis of the problems of alcohol

and its impact on mankind, not only from the point of social sciences but also from the more advanced medical science of today, on its research on alcohol and the human body, particularly the cellular life of the brain. The sutta's two observations on the proneness to health hazards and the risks of brain damage in consequence of the use of drugs and intoxicants exemplify, as it were, the wisdom of clinical studies carried out under well organized laboratory conditions.

Religious counsel and social change

In spite of the generally believed theory of the weakness of man for vice and his irresistible desire for fruits of the forbidden tree, it is gratifying to find that these words of wisdom of the ancient world which endeavor to exalt and elevate the life of man, some of which we have already quoted above, have not gone unheeded all the time. There is evidence from many quarters that these instructions have been thoroughly understood and appreciated and that attempts have been made to incorporate them in the lives of people at large. We would refer here to a piece of Gandhara sculpture from Hadda in Afghanistan which is believed to belong to a period about second century A.D. We remember it was given publicity in a news paper in Calcutta about December 1992, in connection with an exhibition of Gandhara Art which had been then held in Cambridge, England. The caption given beneath the sculpture read as ` Family drinking scene of five figures. From Hadda, South Afghanistan.'

It is our considered opinion that this piece of Gandhara sculpture from Hadda in Afghanistan, belonging to this period of time, is definitely one of Buddhist inspiration. Buddhism was flourishing in Afghanistan at this time, and the impact of Buddhism as a religion with a rich history and a culture has left an evidently deep impress on the lives of the people of the land. We reproduce here a photographic copy of this sculpture, the best we could lay hands on right now, and wish to make a few observations on it.

To us, it is well and truly a sermon in stone. It is indeed a sermon,

highlighting the ill-effects of drinking. It is by no means a trade advertisement for good wine [to boost up a decadent national economy]. Considering the time of its origin, and the wide and extensive popularity of Buddhism in those lands around that region of Afghanistan, Iran, Persia and Iraq at the time [For more details about Buddhism in western Asia during this period, see Encyclopedia of Buddhism - Sri Lanka, Vol. IV. Fasc.I. Art. Central Asia by B.A.Litvinsky], we have very little doubt that this piece of sculpture has its origin under Buddhist inspiration. It is almost traceable to the text on the evils of drinking detailed out in the Sigāla Sutta to which we have referred earlier. The society at the time was apparently going through a trauma of social drinking which was becoming socially problematic. The stone carving which is said to depict a 'Family drinking scene' seems to relentlessly expose to ridicule **the evils of drinking** which our sutta refers to as 'lay bare nudity' or 'expose nakedness' [*kopīna-nidaṃsana*], which virtually amounts to involuntary striptease.

Our sculpture under consideration is a slab-carving of five standing human figures, starting from the left with a young child. Besides him stands a woman who appears to be mature in years and is apparently his mother, holding on high a jar of wine. Next to her stands a man who undoubtedly is her husband. He holds a goblet in hand, more or less ready to drink from it [obviously much more than for the first time.]. Two musicians stand next to him, apparently a younger couple, playing their instruments vigorously, one of which is a mandoline-like two-stringed instrument and the other apparently a tambourine. The total ensemble was no doubt expected to depict in full the associations of wine and song. In the whole composition of the sculpture what vociferously calls our attention are the two central figures of the man and the woman, the master and mistress of the household. It is also obviously and painfully true that they are the parents of the child who is a witness to the scene. In the portrayal in stone of these two major *dramatist personae*, both in the delineation of their human form as well as in capturing their moods and the extent of their drunkenness, these Gandharan artists have reached enviable heights of technical perfection. We

would even go further to say that the sermon they deliver through this carving on stone, is far more binding and grinding than one that could be delivered from a pulpit in temple or tabernacle.

The mother and father in this group are very accurately portrayed as victims of the failing referred to above, of baring their nakedness [*kopīna-nidaṃsana*] in their drunken revelry or Bacchanalian orgy. Both the man and the woman who appear to wear firm belts at the waist seem to be unaware that their lower garments have slipped off much lower than could be permitted in public in decent society, ludicrously exposing their genitalia. The total effect of the scene is doubly heightened by the presence of the child on one side and the musicians on the other. In the world of art, particularly of religious art, we would like to evaluate this piece of sculpture, less on its descriptive accuracy and much more on its prescriptive dynamism and vibrancy. In the world of religious art, sculptures like the Pieta in Rome or paintings like the ascension of Christ by Michael Angelo in the Sistine Chapel on the one hand and the stone carving of the Buddha in his death bed in Parinirvana in Kusinara would live through the centuries as sources of inspiration, perhaps to all mankind. But to us, the stimulus and inspiration and the educative value of even a single solitary piece of work of this nature are of very high-ranking.

This slab-carving, in our opinion, is no mere family picture, like the one in the Vicar of Wakefield. It is meant to be a public document, with an obvious didactic note of inestimable value. It breathes the same spirit like the rock inscriptions of Asoka which were perhaps three or four centuries earlier and had already spread to some of these regions. Evidently it was used as a medium of public instruction and that to propagate Buddhist ideas which were being held in high esteem. We could trace back every detail of this sculpture, as it were, to the Pali texts which we have already quoted and to their accompanying literary traditions. We could, in fact, place the ideas of the Buddhist texts alongside this carving in stone.

In the interests of even a few students of Buddhism who would like to pursue

these issues further, we wish to include here the relevant notes from the Commentarial tradition which are associated with the Sigāla Sutta quoted earlier. We crave your indulgence. [*Kopīna-nidaṃsanī ' ti guyhaṭhānaṃ hi vivariyamānaṃ hiriṃ kopeti vināseti. Tasmā kopīnan ' ti vuccati. Surāmadamattā ca taṃ taṃ aṅgaṃ vivarivā vicaranti. Tena tesaṃ sā surā kopīnassa nidaṃsanato kopīna-nidaṃsanī ' ti vuccati.* DA. III. 945]. The wide prevalence of Buddhism in these regions of western Asia around the beginnings of the Christian era is testified by the discovery of other very specific pieces of Buddhist art, sculptures and paintings, depicting scenes from the life of the Buddha . They record both history and legend in such portrayals like the twin miracles of Sakyamuni Buddha at Sravasti and the ascetic Sumedha at the feet of Buddha Dipankara, receiving assurance of his future Buddhahood.

In the discipline of *pañcasīla* as a medium of human behavior correction and moral rehabilitation, this fifth item of the ban on the use of drugs and intoxicants received our special attention and came to be discussed before the others for two main reasons. As a vice in the human community, it is very personal and private in character, and is much less involved with society and inter-personal relationships. It also appears to be defensible on grounds of restricted and thoroughly regulated use in cases of medical and other such needs. Even in the disciplinary regulations laid down for the monks, we discover this concession made, as in the case of venerable Pilindavaccha who needed to have some medicament prepared, on the advice of physicians [*vejja evaṃ āhaṃsu*], with some intoxicants added to it [*telapāke majjaṃ pakkhipituṃ*. See Vin.I. 204 f.].

But from the earliest times, it has been unfailingly noticed that the granting of such concessions within private territories with regard to items like the use of intoxicants leaves society without any power of prosecution or protection in cases of excesses. Such a situation is reported even the case of the above concession granted in the instance of the illness of Pilindavaccha. This, we believe, is the reason why the ban on intoxicants came to be included from the earliest times in

the fivefold list of the *pañcasīla*, taking its violation as an offense which is damaging both socially and religiously. Before we wind up the discussion on the fifth precept of the ban of intoxicants, we wish to reiterate that the findings of the latest medical research continue to vindicate Buddhism's early observations with regard to the use of drugs and intoxicants and the consequent health hazards and disastrous incidents of brain injury. Buddhism has equally well emphasized that proneness and addiction to these are disruptive to economic well-being and harmonious social relationships.

Getting back now to the larger global view of *pañcasīla*, let it be unequivocally declared that the Buddhist ethics for mankind, based on which and on which alone, the Buddhists are able to qualify themselves to undertake the journey to their transcendental goal of Nirvana, are essentially and basically a regulation of the mutual relationships of humans, one to the other. Putting it theologically, the primary need of the world today, and the need for ever, would be the establishment first of a kingdom of humans on earth, with the concern of everyone for the other, where there would prevail peace and harmony. There shall be no massacres or killings or justification of such activity in the name of targets which humans are only made to believe in as existing beyond this. This attitude of mind and this approach to the solution of human problems according to Buddhism, i.e. conquest of greed and hatred and the consequent restoration of sound judgement among humans, at down to earth level alone, would qualify every man and woman for the attainment of any loftier situation beyond this, whatever that would be, and where ever that would be.

History proves beyond doubt that this is what humanity continually failed to realize and never endeavored at any time to achieve. But this ethic, as we have already shown with the story of the Universal Monarch or Cakkavatti, rises well above partisan sects and creeds of religion and conflicting political ideologies, and attempts to unify humans in harmonious comradeship. It is this ideology, and this aspiration alone which should sweep over continents and communities,

larger or smaller, call them by whatever name one likes, nations, races or ethnic groups or communities with their own religious identities. And as for the efficient and effective running of such a process of harmonious human continuity, the constant and unfailing protective lubricant should be persuasion and personal conviction alone and never pressure, propaganda or persecution, carried out in open or in secrecy. Far too many instances of such injustice, judging by the current run of events, the world would undoubtedly have to witness before the turn of this century.

Social justice and human rights

Let us now begin with the very first item of the *pañcasīla*, namely *pāṇātipātā veramaṇī* which implies the respect for life, the endeavor to protect life and reduce and eliminate the threats to it. Here we are called upon to guard the lives of others, in the same way that we would wish to guard our own. For life is precious and dear to everyone and everyone flees from the threat of death and destruction. Placing oneself in the position of others, let not one kill nor bring about the death of another. The Dhammapada embodies this idea very powerfully in the following verse.

*Sabbe tasanti daṇḍassa sabbe bhāyanti maccuno
attānaṃ upamaṃ katvā na haneyya na ghātaye.*

Dhp. v. 129

All dread being beaten up with the rod.
All dread at the thought of death.
Putting oneself in the position of the other,
Kill not nor have others kill.

Translated by the author

Rejecting the theory of a Creator and a creation of the universe wherein man was believed to be the primary concern of the creator, and therefore everything else created thereafter being for his use, the Buddhist teachings uphold the inter-

relatedness of the entire cosmic setup in both time and space relationships, without any undue over-subordination of anyone or any thing to any other. Animals, for instance, certainly are not to be looked upon as being in the world to serve as food for man. Nor is any group or groups of humans, created or assigned at any time then or now, as the chosen people, to dominate, rule over or overrun others. We have to agree today, at least for the survival of man on earth, that it is highly presumptuous to think contrary to this. Before we agree today to totally discard atomic explosive weapons, it is necessary to ensure that we have these old world myths of race superiority, religious supremacy, and political self-righteousness exploded out of existence. As Buddhists, it is our wish and expectation that we could safely arrive at it, ere long, without facing the horror of yet another Hiroshima. We have to address ourselves to the multifaceted leadership in the world, racial, political and religious, and ask them as to how many of them would and could, and to what extent, give up their prestigiously owned stock in trade. It may even be that we have to secure a safe burial place for some of them, without the danger of contaminating the environment where this unwanted plutonium has to be finally laid to rest.

The twenty-first century should not have to face the curse of these menacing concepts of superiority. This alone would create the correct milieu for the growth of love of humans towards humans at broader inter-racial, inter-religious and inter-political levels. Once this philosophic view of human life as the basis of true love is grasped and understood, it becomes evidently clear that man shall occupy in the universe only that limited and specific position without disrupting and disturbing the much desired cosmic harmony and inter-relatedness. The respect for every little thing in the universe, as contributing its share for a total well being, would naturally safeguard all other forms of life in the universe, including plant and animal. Thus we feel that in the study of the Buddhist concept of respect for life under the first item of the *pañcasīla*, there is very little need to specify the extent of the domain of life. It should be felt and understood in the very process of living, living without obsessions and free from obnoxious legacies which

humans inherit through the contaminating process of history.

The next, i.e. item No. 2 in the list of *pañcasīla*, is the respect for the others' ownership of their justifiably acquired property. The Buddhists admit and respect that possessions are a part of the life sustaining process in lay society. Food, clothing and shelter have to be found or provided. The Buddhists who take to a life of mendicancy in the pursuit of their transcendental goal of Nirvana, voluntarily give up their quest for these, reducing their need of food and clothing. That mendicants are not wage earners in society is respectfully recognized in the Asiatic world. In appreciation of this spiritual propensity of the clergy and the frugality of their life style, the lay society steps forward all the time to supply their basic needs. The attempts to distort this by force, through persuasion and pressure is, to say the least, diabolically mischievous. But the lay community must earn and come to possess their requirements to keep themselves happy. Well-earned, manageable possessions are primarily the basis of day-to-day human happiness. Possessions acquired by people [referred to in Pali as *parassa paravittūpakaraṇaṃ*] are referred to as providing the pleasures of life [*tutthijananam* - See MA.II. 329: *Paravittūpakaraṇan 'ti tass ' eva parassa vittūpakaraṇam tutthijananam parikkhārabhaṇḍakaṃ*]. This is why *pañcasīla* forbids theft or dispossessing others of their legitimate possessions.

Let it not be recklessly said in ignorance, as is sometimes discovered in learned theses of writers on Buddhism, that there is no room for private ownership of property in Buddhism. The defense of private property which Buddhism adopts is essentially based on the legitimacy of acquisition and ownership, that it shall not violate the laws of the land nor come under the censure of men of wisdom and judgement in the land [*Yathā-kama-kāratam āpajjanto adaṇḍā-raho anupavajjo hoti*. DA.I.71 & Khp A. .26]. It is indeed a very high level of extra-legal testing that is resorted to here. In passing, we wish to observe and appreciate that the United Nations Charter of Fundamental Human Rights includes these two items of the *pañcasīla*. This is the first-ever attempt

where a world organization has attempted, at state level as it were, to inculcate these basic human values. It is a post-war product which had its genesis after the World War II. We would do well to recollect here that the Cakkavatti or Universal Monarch of Buddhism initiates this at world level, on a social or secular plane, well over twenty-five centuries ago.

Closely tied up with this second item of respect for the legitimate possessions of others is the fourth item of the *pañcasīla*, namely honesty of word in society, which includes truthfulness of speech, promises and contracts etc. Deception and fraud in the lives of people, both at individual and collective, national and international levels, are reckoned under this. Buddhism consistently frowns upon this human failing and recommends abstinence from it [*musāvādā veramaṇī*] as a regular day-to-day household virtue in the well known Metta Sutta [*Na paro paraṃ nikubbetha*: let no person deceive or cheat another. Sn. v.148]. Truthfulness and reliability and openness of transactions is specifically insisted on [*saccavādī saccasandho theto paccayiko avisaṃvādako lokassa*. MN. I.179] . In the Suttanipāta, the āmagandha Sutta beautifully clusters these vices of theft, falsehood in speech, fraud and deceit as forms of reprehensible behavior in human society.

*Theyyaṃ musāvādo nikati vañcanāni ca
esāmagandho na hi maṃsabhojanaṃ*

Sn. v . 242

We know in the world today that wars and threats of war are often the outcome of such international breaches of treaties and contracts. At individual level in society, such breaches in the form of broken promises are all the time seen leading to atrocious and gruesome killings of men and women, ranging through all age groups. No one invariably seems to be willing to suffer the insult of being deceived and duped. It apparently is venomous in its sting and at the same time disastrously infuriating. It would be mutually beneficial to every one in

society to understand and appreciate this.

Personal gain and profit cannot be allowed to outweigh the worth of honesty. This is why the Buddha declared honesty and trustworthiness as the best of friend and kinsman [*Vissāsaparamā ñātī*. Dhṛ. v. 204]. Let honorable persons and nations who must respect integrity therefore first learn to know their priorities. Let them not expose themselves to worldwide international censure and reproach. Let them thin out a bit of their self-generated density and immunity against public opinion. The Buddha has very wisely given this advice as an essential stand of self-correction in the Metta Sutta we quoted above. 'Let no man stoop too low to commit an evil for which the wise men in society would censure him' [*Na ca khuddaṃ samācare kiñci yena viññū pare upavadeyyuṃ*. Sn. v. 145]. We look upon the nations of the world to be still alive, inwardly and outwardly, to their responsibilities of acting as judges, referees and umpires on the world stage which at times hosts doubtful players and questionable characters.

Sex, freedom and social propriety

Now let us turn our attention to the third item of the *pañcasīla*, to the one that deals with the propriety of sex relationships of men and women in society, married and unmarried, young and old. Sex is primarily looked upon as the channel of human procreation, i.e. the process of continuation of the human species [referred to in the Indian law book of Manu as *santānārthaṃ* - Manusmṛiti Ch. IX. v. 96 specifically speaks of the role of mother and father in this process]. Child-bearing and child-rearing are looked upon as the fulfillment of a social need, obligatory both for the smaller unit of the family and for the larger one of society and community. Therefore the bearing and rearing of children was looked upon as a sacred duty of humans, to be undertaken with a degree of seriousness and responsibility. Thus sex, marriage and child-bearing normally went hand in hand, with love cementing them all together, as it were. The idea of sex outside marriage, either as pre-marital or extra-marital, is not entertained in Buddhism.

Both are looked upon as damaging the worth of marriage as a stable social institution which accepts responsibility for the continuous manning of the social machinery, with its regular provision of men and women, not merely as fodder to be dumped into it, but as reliable and efficient tools which society needs for its manipulation.

Sex tied up with the worth of marriage, and the consequent production of children with mutual responsibility, should now be viewed in retrospect in the world today, with the backdrop of single parent or fatherless families, and unmarried mothers on the one hand, and the dread of sexually transmitted diseases [STD] like Aids on the other. Like babes in the woods, let us not turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to the increasing prevalence in the world today of crimes like rape and adultery and aberrant sexual expressions like incest and paedophilia. In an older tradition, cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are said to have been cursed and destroyed for what was viewed as perverse sexual behavior. But today, such perversions, in the name of liberties and reflections of a developing age, appear to be both approved and endorsed, although undeniably at a painfully high price to everyone.

The wisdom and the vision of our third precept of propriety of sex relationships provides, as it were, a safety valve very much in anticipation. It was indeed provided well before the advent of the horrors of today like the widely rampant sexually transmitted diseases for the elimination and alleviation of which international medical researchers are spending millions. Our precept provides basically a respectful recognition of the female in society as the indispensable and distinguished matrix of society who therefore is to be held in the highest esteem by the males of the community and be constantly guarded and cared for by them.

In the Mahaparinibbana Sutta [DN.II. 74], the Buddha claims that he himself recommended to the Vajjis that they should hold their ladies in high esteem, with no violence in terms of sex, as a foundation for their social success [*aparihāniyā*

dhammā: conditions that arrest social decay]. In the Saleyyaka Sutta which we have already quoted, the Buddha is very specific in his interpretation of this third item of the *pañcasīla* [See MN. I. 286]. It is the unassailable position of the females in the midst of the males of the community, at all stages in their life, as unmarried young girls under the care of parents, brothers and sisters etc., as girls engaged to be married or as married women. The approved and authorized point of entry of a male into the sex life of a female, according to the sensitivity and culture of Buddhism, both social and religious, was marriage.

Thus we see that the major concerns of this injunction are 1. the dignity of woman as the matrix of society, 2. the sanctity of marriage, with conjugal fidelity and consequent family stability, and 3. centralized love and un-dissipated affection within the home, contributing to the healthy growth of the next generation for which, Buddhism upholds the parents as by duty bound. This is why Buddhism elevates parents to a very exalted and dignified position, calling them the divinities in the home [*Brahmā ' ti mātāpitaro*], the first teachers to guide and educate the children [*pubbācariyā ' ti vuccare*], and for this same reason to be also reciprocally revered and respected by the children [*āhuneyyā ca puttānaṃ pajāya anukāṃpakā. Tasmā hi te namasseyya sakkareyyā ' tha paṇḍito. AN.I.132*].

A philosophy and a religion as a way of living: Buddhism

Finally, let us attempt a brief assessment of the value of *pañcasīla* as an instrument of religious discipline in Buddhism. It should be quite clear to every student of Buddhism that it offers nothing to the humans of the world by way of religion which is not directly involved in some way with elevating the quality of life on earth, of man and bird and beast, here and now. Early Buddhism, as Śākyamuni Buddha himself has taught it, is totally a gradual and sustained process of culture, of culturing at the very outset, the physical basis of human life, i.e. its proper control and management [*bhāvita-kāyo*], of culturing moral values [*bhāvita-sīlo*], and developing the domain of wisdom [*bhāvita-pañño ...*

AN. I. 249]. Therefore all the social benefits of *pañcasīla* which accrue to mankind in this very social context of ours, in our lives in this world, both individually and collectively, are organically part and parcel of Buddhism as a religion.

Buddhism's message is that, based on this springboard of life-correction and life-adjustment while one is in the present human existence of this visibly known world, one must gather the necessary power and momentum for his or her leap of transcendence to leave *saṃsāra* behind and speed in the direction of Nirvana. We use the verb speed here deliberately, because we are assured that after the real take off from the launch pad at the stage of stream-entry or *sotāpatti*, one does not keep going in *saṃsāra* any more than seven births before reaching the goal of Nirvana. They go not into an eighth birth, it is declared in the Ratana Sutta [*Na te bhavaṃ aṭṭhamaṃ ādiyanti*. Sn. v. 230]. It is this process of getting into orbit whilst journeying to Nirvana, with a very strict reckoning of time-space considerations [that there shall be no birth in a lower state of existence called *apāya* and that there shall be no incurring of an eighth birth], that we call religious discipline and religious culture in this context.

It is astonishing how Buddhist texts, including some of the earliest like the Samyutta Nikaya among them [See SN. II. 68 ; V. 345, 356, 371, 387. Also AN. III. 35 ; 1V. 405 f.], tie up the perfection of the *pañcasīla* with the attainment of *sotāpatti* which ensures the unflinching ascent to enlightenment in the state of Nirvana [*niyato sambodhiparāyano*]. This enlightenment or the gaining of wisdom [*sammā ñāṇaṃ pahoti*] is avowedly the precursor to release or *vimutti* [Skt. *vimukti*] in Nirvana [*sammā ñānassa sammāvimutti pahoti*. See DN. II. 217 ; MN. III. 76]. We must emphasize here that this is a perfection which is not second to the highly precise count down of a space shuttle on the launch pad, prior to its being fired off from earth and put into orbit.

The *pañcasīla* in this context is referred to as being beloved of the noble ones [*ariyakanta-sīla*], and the high degree of its perfection in quality and

accomplishment is referred to in such terms as 'not being broken or violated' [*akhaṇḍa*], 'not having any flaws' [*acchidda*], 'not speckled or spotted' [*asabala*], and 'not besmeared or stained' [*akammāsa*].

Thus we see that *pañcasīla* provides a closely watched and directed process of development and perfection of humans and that the goodness of humanity and the goodness of the world wherein they dwell rests steady and sits pretty entirely on the humans and not on any other, above or beyond humanity. This why we laid emphasis at the very outset on the role of the individual, at the down-to-earth human level, stressing that personal self-culture is the very basis of religious life in Buddhism . We could finally sum up the position by quoting the Dhammapada which declares it unequivocally thus.

One is one's own Savior. Who else
Or where else could there be another?

Attā hi attano nātho ko hi nātho paro siyā.

Dhp. v. 160

Buddhism is unequivocal in its rejection of a Divine Guardian who presides and sits in judgement over the good and bad doings of humans [*Attāṇo loko anabhissaro*]. Ethics are a part of human concern, calculated to serve its own purpose of well being in the world in which we live and for the higher purpose of transcendence from it on the detection of its limitations. This is the ethic of good loving we seek.

Therefore, O human, to thine own self be true.
There shall never be another to whom you could confess
Your crime against humanity, in order that you may reduce
Your own guilt or relieve the pain of the other.

One final word from the Anguttara Nikaya about humanity's need to be

honest to humanity. Let us not turn our back on self-scrutiny and self-examination and deceitfully present to the world a self-assumed goodness and greatness.

*Natthi loke raho nāma pāpakammaṃ pakubbato
Attā te purisa jānāti saccaṃ vā yadi vā musā
Kalyānaṃ vata bho sakkhi attānaṃ atimaññasi
Yo santaṃ attani pāpaṃ attānaṃ parigūhasi.*

AN. I. 149

To him who does evil there's no place
Where he can keep it a secret.
Your own self, O man, will know
Its truth or its falsehood.
Trying to hide from yourself the evil
That's really within you, O friend,
You are only flattering yourself to be a virtuous self.

Translated by the author

[This paper was presented at an International Buddhist Conference in Seoul in Korea in 1993 while the author was temporarily resident at the **Washington Buddhist Vihara, 5017 16th Street NW, Washington DC 20011, U.S.A.**]

[Five years have passed since this paper was presented in Korea. During this period we have had the opportunity to travel in many countries, Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist, stay in them for shorter or longer periods of time and move with people of diverse sorts. Men, women and children of varying age groups and of rent religious denominations have spoken to us freely in their quest for solutions to many current problems. We have been honest enough to make no attempts to buy anyone over, publicly or secretly. We are very sensitive to international problems at all levels, political, social, economic, moral as well as intellectual. We are stimulated to probe into these areas through our own

awareness of the vastness of the relevant resources on the subject which are available to us in Buddhism. Now this paper goes into print in 1998.

As this monograph now witnesses a reprint in 2001, we wish to append here for the benefit of our readers one of our more recent studies on the subject which went on the air over the SLBC on 23.3.1997 - Articles / serm03].



Ethics for Good Living / Where do Religions Come in?

Bhikkhu Professor Dhammavihari

Greetings to all our listeners on this sacred day of the full moon. You know it, as much as I do, that the sacredness of the poya-day does not lie with the fullness of the moon. Whatever the historians say of these so-called sacred days in different religions, their sanctity has been acquired mainly through association with their founders. For instance the day on which Maya Devi brought forth into the world the future Savior of mankind, i.e. the full-moon day of the month of Vesak [Vaisāhka] in May. Forget not what Theri Mahāpajāpati Gotamī said, eulogising the Buddha, prior to her death: Maya brought forth into the world young Gotama for the weal and welfare of many [*Bahunnaṃ vata atthāya Māyā janayi Gotamaṃ*]. We have again the day on which he really qualified for his mission, i.e. the day on which, being born a mortal, he reached immortality or *amataṃ padaṃ* on the attainment of *sammā sambodhi* or Full Enlightenment. It is only the memories of these events that we cherish and derive joy out of them. In fact the Buddha himself has elevated the glory of the places where these events took place by calling them places of immense religious joy or *saṃvejanīyaṭṭhāna*. Through lapse of time they have got more and more into the realms of myth and legend, leaving behind their real historical greatness.

People today, particularly those in the world of youth, choose to challenge and reject these areas of religion . But why should we let the baby be thrown away with the bath-water? I ask you. How much more sanctity can we bring upon these sacred days through the way we utilise them for our own edification and to serve the cause of others with whom we live, including man, bird and beast. These new modes of thinking are stirrings of the age which are not to be brushed aside. These are areas wherein the youth as much as the older ones, the men as much as the women, clergy as much as the laity, insist that much of the awe and the mysterious elements in religion can be left behind, together with their fading out time segments which give them veneration of antiquity. They need no redecoration and no re-introductions on the windows. Religions need stronger foundations to stand firm on their own feet.

Whatever glorification we seek to bring upon religion depends on what the religions have done to improve the lot of man in the areas of family life, interpersonal relationships and in the wider segment inter-ethnic and inter-religious co-existence. Before we go elsewhere, to a life beyond the present, we like to see here and now the benefits of the religions we so ardently follow. Religions often have a deadening way of making their adherents believe in many areas of their so-called benefits. We have very little doubt that it is after careful study and analysis that religions have come to be called **the opium of mankind**. Let us face up to these charges with honesty and endeavour to put things right. But whether we like it or not, we have to admit that religions of the world today, the major ones at that, do not have a very flattering record of their performance in these areas to their credit.

It is to be admitted that by all realistic reckonings, men and women go through life in the world under many handicaps and hardships. Science and technology are developing at such a rate that we find ourselves out of step to keep track of their progress. Organ transplant is now a thing of the distant past. We should today be talking of cloning of sheep. You would have read in the news

papers how a young sheep by the name of Dolly was produced recently. Starting with Dr. Bernard Christian, the surgeons of the world have made it possible for old human hearts to be replaced with new ones. Due to non-availability and inadequacy of replacements, they hit upon the bright idea of using hearts of pigs for this purpose. They even went so far as having pig farms set up to ensure adequate supplies of hearts. But they discovered early enough the danger of those pigs carrying dangerous viruses like the HIV, with the possibility of accelerated development of Aids and infecting many more humans, without any danger to themselves. With all the so-called scientific development, the basic inherent defects and weaknesses of human life, of its very physical basis, are no better than when we started.

With a global situation of this magnitude, it makes much sense for man to face up to it with courage and wisdom. If one does so, then one knows what makes these situations better or worse. Buddhism teaches that with all those born into this world, ageing is a reality. Disease and decay are well and truly dear companions of life, whether we like them or not. What any sensible person would do in these circumstances is to safeguard oneself against such situations. Not make vows and prayers at every wayside shrine. Nor make more and more halting places for visiting healers, human or believed to be divine. It is the fashion of the day for these claimants to healing to move noisily from one continent to another. Where poverty and ignorance prevail, they believe they can gather bumper harvests. But this, truly is not the way to combat disease. It is far better then to prevail upon these divine agents to act in advance and operate more in the area of prevention, if they have any power at all to do so. It will save mankind a great deal more of physical and mental pain, and even a greater deal more of money and time. Let those powers whom we supplicate and to whom we address our prayers prevent those calamitous disasters and accidents in the words which cost the humans their lives. It would be much more profitable and much less painful than rushing around ambulances after the calamitous has happened.

On the question of life security, whether in terms of the health of oneself or family members, or in terms of employment security, or financial escalation, personal confidence or self-reliance seems to be at a very low ebb today. Little wonder when law enforcement in the country is perhaps at its lowest by any world standards. It is at such lower-than-slum levels of thinking that people who are helplessly sunk in miserably wretched conditions or who believe themselves to be so, run in search of relief and assistance from a wide range of newly appointed divinities. They claim to be getting ahead of latest in medical research. While many are disappointed at the end of such appeals and such contracts, and nobody ever produces their statistics, a few who claim they have been rewarded do a great deal of propaganda on behalf of these divinities and a far greater deal of canvassing. Perhaps it serves both parties well.

Take a further look at ourselves in society today. No man, woman or child is safe in any other's hands, even whatever be the family relationships to one another. It is so today, whether it be in the city or the village. Incest, rape and adultery and similar incidents of aberrant animal-like sex behaviour are as bad as in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah of Biblical records. What of the more trendy and publicly attractive, and at times even very much championed and tourism-wise attractive homosexuals and paedophiles? In all these adventures, better we term them misadventures, sometimes looked upon as romantic by quite a few, the material we deal with are humans. Not mere pithecanthropus erectus. Perhaps the gorillas and the chimpanzees, as Jane Goodall has demonstrated in her monumental research on the chimpanzees, have among them a much higher culture than we imagine.

All the world over we read today about the life disasters of now-grown-up men and women who in their younger years have been victims of rape and paedophile like crimes. The criminality of these offences committed by the older upon the younger of our own flock are intolerably shameful and offensive. If an animal turned upon any one of us or any one near and dear to us then, no

mistake, we look around and reach for the nearest gun. Why then do we humans connive with humans in this type of gang villainy. We know what happened in Belgium recently. A string of horrendous crimes on innocent young girls which made the whole world weep. Not to protest and not to raise an alarm in this kind of highly anti-social activity, and at least gather ourselves for collective action, would be no less than actual gang villainy. Shall we be accused of this?

It is in such a world context like the present, anywhere and everywhere, that we have to generate within us such a concept like good living. The much spoken of religious identities or ethnic garnishing, as are currently prevalent in Sri Lanka today, should not stand in the way of such a magnanimous move. We are fully aware that tidal waves of global evangelisation and trans-continental ethnic inundations are menacingly overrunning every continent and sub-continent. We know quite well that even smaller-size island countries are not spared. Most of us have seen and sensed this as something that is now happening in our very presence. But there is a definite dullness and density in our reacting to this situation. We are being indoctrinated from numerous sources to react so, in this manner.

What really is the reason for this apathy? Whether one really senses it or not, human life seems to count for nothing these days. What happened in the battle fields of World War II, both in victory and in defeat, came to be glorified as noble acts of sacrifice and patriotism. *Dulce et honestum pro patria mori* runs this slogan-like utterance in Latin. It means 'It is sweet and honourable to die for the sake of one's motheland.' Who achieved what at the end of it all remains the unanswered question, beautifully locked up in the black box. Then come the tribal battles of warring groups. These are colossal and wasteful massacres of human lives. While they are classed as genocide on the one side, they are much eulogised as wars of liberation on the other. Religious groups gleefully compete with one another to dispatch the war-dead to heaven or to liberation. Though not necessarily disparagingly, we were used to refer to those who were victims of

such stupified thinking as cannon fodder. So with very little clear thinking, we gradually learnt to pray for the repose of the souls of those dead, perhaps once a year on a war veterans' day. This is apparently no less than allowing ourselves to be brainwashed.

The very bottom of this degradation of the worth of human life, in consequence of contemporary militant thinking, has been reached today where men and women are being freely hired or harnessed to serve as human bombs. A few of this type were known in World War II where, in the Eastern theatre of war, the Japanese used what they called frogmen for under water attack on ships lying in harbours. That disappeared, more or less, with the end of the war. But suicide bombers are now the order of the day here. That they are being used, both men and women, in a big way seems to be nobody's concern. If those who do it can afford it, why should it be anybody else's concern would be the challenging question. Brainwashed or otherwise, does this not make talk of human rights, as they are being discussed even in legal parlours over various issues, look utterly stupid. Who then would or should have a right to talk about slave labour, child abuse etc.? Are the legal telescopes placed on international blind eyes? International eyes are quite often seen to pass off as blind. This is the honest impression one gets as one scans the international horizons from time to time, east or west.

It is the reality and the seriousness of this reality which makes us pick up a subject like **good living** and **ethics for good living**. Experience of humanity, living on this planet over several millennia, has produced a vast fabric yielding good samples for closer scrutiny. It is now agreed that it is the frantic search for the glory of the so-called material culture of mankind, with the like of Roman amphitheatres, that catapulted the collapse of those vast civilizations. Men and women sitting comfortably with wine and song, to gratify their sense pleasures at the expense of a few other helpless humans put into encounters of life and death in the midst of ferocious beasts. Today's sense of entertainment and enjoyment

has crossed over to yet another area much more perilous than this. Not only is the entertainer in peril today. Those who seek entertainment through these corrosive channels, not only expose themselves to enormous areas of ruin, but also expose others who are near and dear to them to similar or far greater destruction. Today's addiction to alcohol, from teenagers of both sexes to alcoholics of ripe old age, and proneness to tobacco and other drugs are inestimable in the destruction they cause to human lives. They know the destruction and damage smoke and dust causes to structures like the London Bridge. They also know of the destruction passive smoking does to the women and children who live in a smoker's home. But the positive damage to iron perhaps is more physically visible and therefore more convincing.

The same is equally true of the pursuit of sex. Whether one calls sex a primary instinct or not, now the world is reaching a stage, at least outside Sri Lanka, when the need is felt to set limits to its pursuit and enjoyment. The social disruptiveness of the wild chase for sex gratification as well as the equally disastrous damage it does to the health of humans, even across generations, as in the case of AIDS, is all too well known. Abortion, together with problems of unmarried mothers and single parent homes, not only call for comment but for serious study at all levels of religion and society. We are proud indeed that teenage girls of the United States of America, backed by the Methodist Church in that country, are genuinely and adequately vociferous in their protest against teenage sex and sex exploitation. It is they in America, specially their psychologists and psychiatrists who now tell the world about such concepts like ageing and saging, about the need to instruct children about delaying gratification. Beneath these new trends in thinking which show themselves up in the western world, we discern a new ray of hope for the future of the world, i.e. for the survival humanity on this earth.

It is here that we wish to invoke the religions of the world to step in to fulfil honourably the role which devolves upon them by virtue of what they claim they

stand for. We have to believe that they are not down here on earth to serve a God above at the expense of man. We must understand our prime duty to be to make life of men and women down here on earth to be divinely acceptable for the benefit of one another. A kingdom of man amongst us has to be our first priority. This is the way the Buddhists are taught to look at this problem. It is the goodness of humans as humans, achieved through a clearly laid down process of self-correction, that elevates them to higher levels of divine living here and now.

These are what the Buddhists refer to as *Brahma-vihara* or divine modes of living. Universal loving kindness, in a spirit of amity, is our starting point. It is a two-way love of direct friendship, without a mediating third party. That directness is explicitly contained in the word *maitri* or *mettā*. It is love that knows no bounds. The Metta Sutta refers to it as *asambādham averam asapattam*. This is followed by loving thoughts of compassion or *karuṇā* to relieve those in pain and misery and in less fortunate circumstances. Friendship of loving kindness has already preceded it. In such a loving, well-wishing amicable community, Buddhist thinking leaves no room for jealousies and competitive rivalries. So we have the third virtue that grows up in this series in *muditā* which we would choose to translate as **appreciative joy**. We are not very happy with its current translation as **sympathetic joy**.

A frame of mind of this sort, with a deep-seated sense of love for amity [*mettā*], of compassion for sympathy [*karuṇā*] and a joyous appreciation of the success of others [*muditā*] will very naturally promote the growth of a social ethic which will successfully handle multiple areas of human relationships. These will invariably lead to harmonious community living, with a real and serious concern for the weal and welfare of every other person in whose midst we live, and have to live, as social beings. The Buddhist teachings refer to the absence of such a robust ethic as a state of anarchy in society where dread and fear [that is *bhaya*] as well as enmity and hostility [*vera*] reign supreme. Buddhist teachings, both in

the interests of their transcendental aspirations as well as in their interests of social well being, insist on the elimination of these out of the human community. They speak of the *vūpasamana* of these *pañca-bhayāni* and *pañca-verāni*. The way to achieving this is given as the social restraint achieved via the moral rectitude of the *pañcasīla*.

Let me wind up my sermon to you today with a very brief introduction to this area of Buddhist ethics. Buddhism offers it to the world in a very magnanimous way, very gently and respectfully via the concept of the Universal Monarch or Cakkavatti King. What is meaningfully interesting and seriously applicable about it is its relevance to the world situation today. It reckons with humanity as a totality, a global community at that, without any violent regional differences on the basis of ethnicity, political ideology or religious creeds followed. All manner of rulers from the east and the west, the north and the south come to the Cakkavatti and invite him to instruct them as to how each one of them should rule their land.

What is amazing in this context is that what goes out from this one central authority of the Cakkavatti has one unmistakable dominant note. It insists: **Never mind the political pattern you have followed so far. Carry on as you have done before. But guarantee that social justice and moral order prevail within your kingdoms.** Buddhist teachings attempt to achieve this through the propagation of what is known as the *pañcasīla*. We have already referred to the need in society of these fivefold restraints of 1. respect for life of all sorts, 2. respect for the other's ownership of his or her legitimate property, 3. respect for the gender roles of men and women and the consequent regulation of sex behaviour in society, 4. respect for decency in honesty in word or deed, and 5. respect for maintenance of sanity of judgement by avoidance of drugs and alcohol. This we bravely call the Fundamental Human Rights Charter of the Buddhists, issued to the world as a whole well over twenty-five centuries ago. Until we are clever enough to evolve anything acceptably better, why not give it a decent trial? Make up your mind, right now.

**May all beings be well and happy. May there be peace on earth and good will
among men.**